more positive evaluations from the children than from their parents? Would boys be more likely than girls to make positive comments about a restrictive rating?

The fourth question was whether children would be more or less likely to comply with decisions made regarding programs with advisories than programs without advisories. In other words, would a program that was rejected that had an advisory become more tempting than a program that was rejected that did not have an advisory?

Method

Participants

The sample included 70 parent-child dyads who were recruited from five parochial schools in the Madison, Wisconsin area. Thirty-six of the dyads included children in the younger group, who were attending kindergarten or first grade. They ranged in age from 5 to 7, with a mean age of 6.2 years. Thirty-four of the dyads, the older group, involved children in fourth or fifth grade. These children ranged in age from 9 to 11, with a mean age of 9.3 years. Within each age group, there was an equal number of girls and boys. The sample of parents contained 4 fathers and 66 mothers. Participants were recruited by letter, and parents' informed consent was obtained prior to their participation.

Procedure

Parents and children were brought into an empty classroom at the child's school. They were seated on chairs in front of a television, a VCR, and a camera. The session was described as a study of children's responses to television, and it was explained that we wanted to be more realistic by giving the participants a choice of several programs to view. The participants were also asked for their permission to be videotaped during the session.

After agreeing to the procedures, the pair was given a television program guide booklet, somewhat similar to the one used in the main experiment. The participants were told to select one program on each page of the booklet. In addition, they were invited to indicate whether, for each non-chosen program, they felt "neutral" about it or actively rejected that choice. Finally, they were asked to rank-order their choices among all programs that were not rejected.

The experimenter left the room while the parent and child made their decisions. After the choices had been made, the experimenter returned and escorted the parent out of the room to fill out some questionnaires, taking the choice booklet with her. At this time, a second experimenter entered the room to show the child a program. She brought with her a booklet similar to the one the child had seen, but this one had not been filled out. She stated that she did not know which programs had been chosen, and asked which of the programs on Page 3 of the booklet the child wanted to watch. The experimenter then appeared to look for that tape and professed not being able to find it. She then gave the child a choice among the three situation comedies listed on Page 1 of the booklet. The child was then shown a scene from the chosen sitcom.

After viewing the program, the child filled out a brief questionnaire tapping measures not directly relevant to the violence project. After completing the questionnaire, the child was given a small gift and reunited with the parent. Both were then thanked for their participation.

Materials

The viewing-choice booklet described three available programs on each of four pages. Pages 1 and 2 contained descriptions of three real situation comedies and three current violent cartoons, respectively. Page 3 contained titles of three fictitious reality-action programs. These programs were given the titles *Criminals at Large, Cop Scenes from the Street,* and *Detectives Live!* Each title was followed by a brief description of the episode. In each booklet, one of these programs, at random, was given the advisory "Contains some violence. Parental discretion advised."

Page 4 contained the fictitious titles of three animated violent movies. These movies were titled *Mission Pilot X, Robot Renegades,* and *Kombat III,* and each title was followed by a brief plot description. One of these movies, at random, was given the rating of "PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned." The other two were assigned a "PG" rating.

Measures

Parent-child viewing choices were recorded as the dyad's first choice on Pages 3 and 4 of booklet. Any programs or movies that were rejected were noted as well. When the child made a choice of what to view when the parent was out of the room, the child's behavior was considered noncompliant if he or she chose a program that had been rejected earlier by the dyad.

The videotaped discussions were coded for comments made by the parent and child about the advisory or the "PG-13" rating. These comments were categorized as "favorable," (e.g., "Cool!"), "unfavorable," (e.g., "not 'PG-13'") or "neutral" toward the advisory. A second coder categorized a randomly selected subset of 23% of the videotapes. Scott's pi, computed on these categorizations, was .88.

Results

Parent-Child Viewing Choices

Programs with parental discretion advisories. As expected, there was a strong tendency to avoid choosing the program with the advisory when parents and children made their decisions in concert. Out of the 70 dyads, only five (7%) chose a program with an advisory, and this percentage was dramatically and significantly below chance expectations of 33.3% ($p<.001$). Because of the small number of dyads choosing a program with an advisory, comparisons between subgroups were destined to fall short of statistical significance. Dyads involving both younger and older children chose programs with advisories significantly below chance levels. Only one dyad out of the 34 involving a younger child chose a program with the advisory (3%, $p<.001$), and only four out of the 36 dyads involving older children did so (11%, $p<.01$). Similarly,

dyads involving both boys and girls chose such programs significantly below chance levels. Only one of the 34 dyads involving boys selected a program with the advisory (3%, $p<.001$), and 4 of the 36 dyads involving girls did so (11%, $p<.01$).

In these data on parental discretion advisories, then, there is only a slight suggestion that parents were more "protective" of their younger than their older children. The expectation that dyads with boys would choose programs with advisories more often than dyads with girls received even less support, since the significance of the tendency to avoid such programs was stronger among dyads with boys than among dyads with girls.

Movies with "PG-13" ratings. The tendency to avoid movies with "PG-13" ratings when pitted against others rated "PG" was not as strong as the tendency to avoid programs with advisories. Out of the 70 dyads, ten (14%) chose the movie that had the "PG-13" rating, and this number was significantly below the 33.3% that would be expected by chance ($p=.001$). In these data, choice of "PG-13" was significantly below chance for dyads involving younger, but not for those involving older children. Three of 34 dyads with younger children (9%) chose the "PG-13" movie ($p<.01$), while 7 of 36 dyads with older children (19%) did so ($p=.11$). As for the impact of the child's gender, the tendency to avoid the "PG-13" movie only approached significance in dyads with boys, but it was significant in dyads with girls. Six out of 34, or 18% of the dyads with boys chose the movie with the "PG-13" rating ($p=.08$), while 4 out of 36, or 11% of the dyads with girls chose such a movie ($p<.01$).

The Role of Advisories and Ratings in Parent-Child Discussions

Parents' comments about advisories and ratings. Parents made many comments about the advisory and the "PG-13" rating, and these comments were almost entirely negative. Eighteen parents in dyads with younger children (50%) made comments about the advisories. All of these comments were unfavorable, indicating that the content was inappropriate or that the child could not see the program. Three of these parents mentioned the child's age as a reason to avoid the program (e.g., "that means it's for big kids"); six referred to the violence in the advisory (e.g., "it says there's violence. I don't think we'd like that"); one mentioned that it would be frightening ("it means it's scary"). The remaining parents gave nonspecific negative references [e.g., "not with that" (pointing to the advisory)]. Fifteen parents in dyads with older children (44%) made comments about the advisory, and all of these comments, too, were negative. Two of these parents referred to the violence (e.g., "Says it contains violence and so no"). The remainder of the negative comments did not specify why (e.g., "parental discretion. I'd probably say not.")

Twenty parents in dyads with younger children (56%) made comments about the "PG-13" rating, and all of these were negative. Seven of these referred to the child's age as an issue (e.g., "you're not old enough"); and three others said that it would be frightening (e.g., "it means it's scary"). The remainder made nonspecific negative comments (e.g., "Not PG-13"). Fifteen parents in dyads with older children (44%) made comments about the "PG-13" rating. One of these comments had a positive tone, but it may have been tongue-in-cheek ("I'm strongly cautioned, so that's the one!"

[laughing]). All of the remaining comments made nonspecific negative references to the "PG-13" rating (e.g., "You've seen PG. PG-13 has a lesser chance.")

Children's comments about advisories and ratings. The children did not comment on the advisory or the "PG-13" rating nearly as often as their parents, but when they did, their comments were more evenly split between favorable and unfavorable judgments. In dyads with younger children, 4 children (11%) made unfavorable references to the advisory (one suggesting it would be "scary") and 1 (3%) made a favorable reference (saying "oh yes, please???" after reading the advisory). In contrast, in dyads with older children, 3 (9%) made unfavorable references to the advisory (e.g., "sounds violent"), but 7 (20%) made favorable references (e.g., after reading the advisory, "that's awesome!" and "they all say that. It's fine. They just all say that.") The difference between younger and older children in their tendency to make favorable references to the advisory was significant ($\underline{X}^2(1, N=70)=4.70, \underline{p}<.05$).

A similar pattern was observed in children's references to the "PG-13" rating, although the difference between older and younger children was not significant. Among dyads with younger children, 4 children (11%) made unfavorable references to the "PG-13" rating (e.g, "does it mean bad?") and 2 (6%) made positive references (e.g., after reading the advisory, "I'll take it"). Among dyads with older children, one child (3%) said something negative about the "PG-13" rating ("PG-13. Adios"), and 6 (18%) said something positive about it (e.g., "PG-13. Choose that one"). One older girl said, "those two [PG-rated movies] are little loser ones. They rated *Home Alone* 'PG.' The cooler the movie, the higher the rating."

It is not surprising that positive comments about the advisory and the "PG-13" rating were more frequent among older than younger children. However, the expected gender difference in these comments did not materialize. The favorable comments about the advisory and the "PG-13" rating were equally split between girls and boys.

Compliance with Joint Decisions

When the children were given the choice, outside their parent's presence, between the three reality-action programs, 16 of them (23%) chose a program that had been rejected during the joint decision-making process. However, choosing a program that had been rejected was no more likely when the rejected program had an advisory than when it did not: Seven of the noncompliant children chose a rejected program that had an advisory, while nine children chose a rejected program that did not have an advisory. Five of the seven children who chose a rejected program that had an advisory were boys (4 older and one younger); the two girls were both younger. Of the nine children who chose a rejected program that did not have an advisory, six were boys (four older and two younger); of the three girls, two were older and one was younger.

There is thus no evidence from these data that a program with an advisory that is rejected becomes more tempting than one without an advisory that is rejected.

PART III: COLLEGE STUDENTS' INTEREST IN MOVIES ON TELEVISION AS A FUNCTION OF MPAA RATINGS

A third study was conducted (with the help of Nick Van Straten) to determine the degree to which information about a movie's MPAA rating would influence college undergraduates' desire to see the movie. A large sample of college students participated in an experiment in which they gave ratings of how interested they would be in seeing a series of five movies if they were to appear on television. Different types of movies were selected, some containing violence, some sex, and some, both sex and violence. In different booklets, the same movie was associated with a different MPAA rating. Some movie descriptions were ambiguous enough that they could credibly be assigned to a wide range of ratings. Others were confined to a narrower range. In addition to variations in MPAA ratings, one of the movies also contained variations in the new content codes being used on some premium channels. The effect of MPAA ratings on students' evaluations of a movie scene was also examined.

Method

Participants

Five hundred seventy-four University of Wisconsin-Madison students were recruited from classes in the Business School and in the Departments of Communication Arts and Journalism. Participants received extra class credit in exchange for their participation. Approximately 44% of the sample was male. The mean age of the sample was 20.3 years.

Procedure

Participants reported to testing sessions in groups ranging from 10 to 25. They were told about the procedures to be followed and signed consent forms regarding their participation.

Participants each filled out a movie-interest booklet. They were told that they would read descriptions of five movies as they might be presented in the television listings. They were asked to indicate how interested they would be in seeing each movie if it were shown on television. There were five films, each described on a separate page. After indicating their level of interest in the five movies, they were told that they would see some film clips from the last movie described. Because this movie had been associated with different ratings in different booklets, different subjects were led to believe the movie they were seeing had been differentially rated. After seeing the movie segment, subjects filled out a questionnaire assessing their judgments and evaluations of the movie. They were also asked about their recall of the rating of the movie.

Materials

The first movie in the booklet, titled *Shadowman*, was about a jewel theft and a falsely accused man attempting to find the real criminals. In different booklets it

was rated "G," "PG," "PG-13," or "R," or no rating was indicated. The second movie, titled *Lost in London*, was about an "alienated art student" being introduced to "sensual pleasures." It was rated "PG-13" or "R," or was not associated with a rating.

The third movie, titled *Witnesses*, was described as a "gritty melodrama" pitting small-town policemen against drug-dealing killers. The film was rated either "PG-13" or "R," and each of these ratings appeared by itself or was paired with "MV: Mild Violence," "V: Violence," or "GV: Graphic Violence." In addition to these eight conditions, there was a condition in which the movie received no rating.

The fourth movie, titled *Love Hurts*, was described as a story about a woman who introduces a "womanizing disc-jockey" to a sensual world of pain mixed with pleasure. This movie, which suggested a mixture of sex and violence, was rated "PG-13," "R," or "NC-17," or had no rating.

The final movie was called *Rage*. It was described as portraying a blind Vietnam veteran who takes on a gang of Mafia killers. Like the fourth movie, it was rated "PG-13," "R," or "NC-17," or had no rating.

The movie scene that was shown was introduced as an excerpt from *Rage*, but it was actually from *Blind Fury* (1989). The scene involved the blind Vietnam veteran, played by Rutger Hauer, coming to the aid of the widow of one of his army buddies as she and her son are attacked by vicious killers. Although blind, he has a keen "sixth sense" and is able to overcome his attackers when they think he is the most vulnerable. The movie was originally rated "R."

Measures

Participants indicated their interest in seeing the movie on a 7-point scale ranging from 1, labeled "not at all," to 7, labeled "very very much." After viewing the movie segment, they were asked to indicate the following on the same seven-point scale: 1) how much they liked the segment, 2) how violent they thought the segment was, 3) how much they wanted to see the whole movie, 4) how violent they thought the movie would be, and 5) how sexually explicit they thought the movie would be. They were also asked to indicate what they remembered the movie's rating to have been.

Results

Interest in Movies

Overall, students' reported interest in the movies described in the booklets was only minimally affected by the ratings the movies were assigned. Analyses of variance were conducted on ratings of interest in the movies, with the participant's gender and the movie's rating as the independent variables. For the first movie, *Shadowman*, about the jewel theft, which was associated with "G," "PG," "PG-13," "R," or no rating, there were no significant effects of ratings, gender, or the interaction.

For *Lost in London*, the movie whose description suggested sex but not violence, there was a significant effect of gender ($F(1,550)=9.19$, $p<.01$). Males expressed more interest in the movie than females (4.3 vs. 3.9 on a 7-point scale). Although the main effect of ratings ("PG-13," "R," or no rating) was not significant, there was a significant ratings by gender interaction ($F(2,550)=4.10$, $p<.05$). Males showed greater interest in the movie when it was rated "R" or had no rating than when it was rated "PG-13." Females, in contrast, showed greater interest in the movie when it was rated "PG-13," than when it was rated "R" or had no rating. However, Scheffé tests revealed that these differences between means were not significant.

In a three-factor analysis of variance of interest in *Witnesses*, involving rating (PG-13, R), violence code (none, MV, V, or GV), and gender of subject, there were no significant effects of rating, violence code, or their interaction. The only significant effect was that of gender ($F(1,476)=36.73$, $p<.001$), with males showing significantly greater interest in this violent movie than females (4.3 vs. 3.4). Gender did not interact with either rating or violence code in this analysis. When the no-rating condition was included in an analysis involving three levels of rating (no rating, PG-13, R) and gender, the results were essentially the same. There was again a strong main effect of gender, but no effect of ratings, and no interaction between ratings and gender.

There were no significant effects in the analysis of *Love Hurts*, a movie whose description suggested a mixture of sex and violence, and was associated with "PG-13," "R," "NC-17," or no rating.

Interest in the final movie, *Rage*, was marginally affected by its purported rating (PG-13, R, NC-17, or no rating), with the F-ratio only approaching significance $F(3,557)=2.12$, $p=.10$) in spite of the very large sample size. Subsequent tests revealed that none of the means of the ratings conditions differed significantly. There was a highly significant effect of gender ($F(1,557)=61.08$, $p<.001$), with males more interested in the movie than females (4.0 vs. 3.0).

Evaluation of Movie Clip

Participants' evaluations of the movie clip were only minimally affected by the rating they were told the movie had. Analyses of variance were conducted on the participants' responses to the five questions asked after the movie was seen. These analyses involved the participant's gender and the movie's purported rating (no rating, PG-13, R, or NC-17) as independent variables. For four out of the five questions, the only significant effect was a main effect of gender. Males liked the movie clips significantly more than females ($F(1,557)=70.57$, $p<.001$), with men giving the movie a mean "liking" rating of 4.2 vs. 2.9 for women. Males expressed significantly more interest than females in seeing the whole movie ($F(1,558)=38.44$, $p<.001$; males, 3.9; females, 2.9). Females saw the movie as significantly more violent than males did ($F(1,558)=17.42$, $p<.001$; males, 5.5; females, 5.9), and they expected the whole movie to be more violent ($F(1,557)=27.18$, $p<.001$; males, 5.5; females, 5.9).

The only response to the movie that was affected by the movie's rating was participants' expectations of how sexually explicit the whole movie would be. These

responses were affected by both the movie's rating and the participant's gender. Males expected the movie to be less sexually explicit than females ($F(1,557)=10.67$, $p<.001$; males, 3.1; females, 3.5), and expectations of sexual explicitness increased as the ratings became more restrictive. The means were as follows: no rating, 3.0; "PG-13," 3.1; "R," 3.3, and "NC-17," 3.6. Scheffé comparisons revealed that the movie was expected to be significantly more sexually explicit in the "NC-17" condition than in the no-rating and "PG-13" conditions.

Memory for Movie's Rating

Like the children in the main experiment, the college students in this experiment did not have good recall of the rating they were told the movie had. Overall, by the end of the session, only about 40% answered correctly when asked what the rating of *Rage* was, and slightly over one-fourth said they did not recall the rating. Correct recall was higher in the conditions in which the movie was rated "R" (51.4%) and "NC-17" (52.4%), than when it was rated "PG-13" (23.4%) or had no rating (32.1%).

When the ratings of interest in the movie *Rage* were reanalyzed, including only the 229 participants who remembered the movie's rating correctly, the results were essentially the same as those reported above, with the exception that in the smaller analysis, the effect of ratings did not even approach significance. In addition, analyses of evaluations of the movie including only those 229 participants were essentially the same as analyses computed on the entire sample, with one exception. In the smaller analysis, there was a significant effect of the movie's rating on expectations of the level of violence in the whole movie ($F(3,218)=2.79$, $p<.05$). The means of the four conditions were as follows: no rating, 5.7; "PG-13," 5.3; "R," 5.7; "NC-17," 5.9. Scheffé comparisons indicated that the whole movie was expected to contain significantly more violence when it was rated "NC-17" than when it was rated "PG-13."

Overall, the most compelling aspect of the results of this study of college students is the paucity of significant effects of ratings. Put simply, these ratings had very little impact on these students' expressed interest in these movies. The lack of significance is especially striking given the very large sample size involved in this study. These findings are in some sense consistent with the earlier findings of Austin (1980), who also reported no significant impact of MPAA ratings on college students' interest in movies. Although that study was criticized earlier for a potential problem in the credibility of the manipulation, our experiment also reported essentially null findings.

One procedural similarity between these two studies is that both posed viewing choices hypothetically rather than giving students choices that would result in their viewing of the selected movies. Therefore, research should be conducted in which actual choices are measured before we can finally conclude that MPAA ratings have minimal effects on college students' viewing choices.

PART IV: THE USE OF ADVISORIES AND RATINGS IN THE COMPOSITE WEEK OF TELEVISON

The final part of this report describes the use of advisories, ratings, and content codes in the random sample of television that was taped in Los Angeles and content analyzed in Santa Barbara and Austin. It should be kept in mind that the Year 1 analysis constitutes mainly a base-level against which Years 2 and 3 can be compared. At present, the use of these ratings, codes and advisories cannot be evaluated in relation to the violent content of these programs, so statements about the appropriateness of these messages would be premature.

A description of the sampling procedures and the overall characteristics of the random sample is contained in the report from the Santa Barbara site. When programs were screened by the content coders in Santa Barbara and Austin, they were given codes for the presence of advisories, MPAA ratings, and the more specific content codes recently adopted by some premium channels. The coders also indicated whether these messages were communicated orally, in written form, or both orally and in writing. The text of all advisories was written down verbatim. This text was then further categorized by coders at the Madison site. Because occasionally there were problems with the taping of programs, which resulted in the initial minute or so of the program not being included on the tape, a small proportion of programs could not be evaluated regarding the use of ratings and advisories. The data to be reported here reflect an analysis of only those tapes for which the entire introductory portion of the program was available.

Coding of Advisories

Advisories refer to short verbal messages that precede programs and can take a variety of forms, but typically involve advocating caution or discretion regarding the upcoming program, e.g., "viewer discretion advised." A few advisories characterize the program in other ways, such as involving actual footage or dramatizations of real events. Advisories were analyzed separately from the MPAA Ratings (G, PG, PG-13, and R), and the content codes (e.g., MV: Mild Violence). The data sets that were assembled at Santa Barbara and Austin indicated whether or not an oral advisory was aired with a program and whether or not a written advisory was present. One coder at the Madison site categorized the text of the advisories on a series of variables. A randomly selected subset consisting of 20% of the advisories was categorized by a second coder. The coding variables are described below. Agreement was 100% for all variables.

Whose Discretion Is Advocated?

The advisories were first coded according to whether or not discretion was advised, and further, according to whose discretion was being advocated. Advisories were coded as advocating "parental" discretion (e.g., "parental discretion advised"), "viewer" discretion, (e.g., "viewer discretion advised"), "discretion" without a specific target (e.g., "discretion advised"), as presenting a "warning" or other admonition, but no mention of discretion (e.g., "warning: this program contains ..."), or as including no reference to discretion or warnings.

Unsuitable for Which Viewers?

Independent of the presence of "discretion" or "warnings," the advisories were coded for whether they indicated that the program might be inappropriate for specific viewer categories. Advisories were coded as indicating that the content might be inappropriate for children, (e.g., "portions of the following may not be suitable for younger audiences") or for unspecified viewers, not including children (e.g., "the following movie [contains graphic scenes and] may be too intense for some viewers"), or as not indicating any inappropriate viewer categories.

Content Mentioned

Five variables indicated whether or not the advisory mentioned the following content: violence, language, sex or nudity, adult themes, or unspecified inappropriate content. An example of the latter category is "the following program contains certain scenes [which may be too intense for young children]".

Humor

A final variable indicated whether or not the advisory seemed to be presented in a "tongue in cheek" fashion, rather than in a serious mode. For example, the following advisory aired on MTV: "Beavis & Butthead are not role models. They're not even human. They're cartoons. Some of the things they do would cause a person to get hurt, expelled, arrested, possibly deported. To put it another way: Don't try this at home.").

Use of Advisories in the Sample

Presence of Oral and Written Advisories

A frequency analysis of the presence of advisories presented orally indicated that 98, or 4.0% of the 2445 programs that could be evaluated were aired with oral advisories. Slightly more, or 105 programs (4.2%) were aired with written advisories. The overwhelming majority of advisories were presented in both oral and written form, and contained essentially the same information in both modes. Figure 14 shows the distribution of written advisories over the channels in the sample. There were differences between the number of oral and written advisories on only three channels. FOX had nine written but only two oral advisories; Lifetime had five written but three oral advisories; and NBC communicated one advisory in writing, but aired four orally.

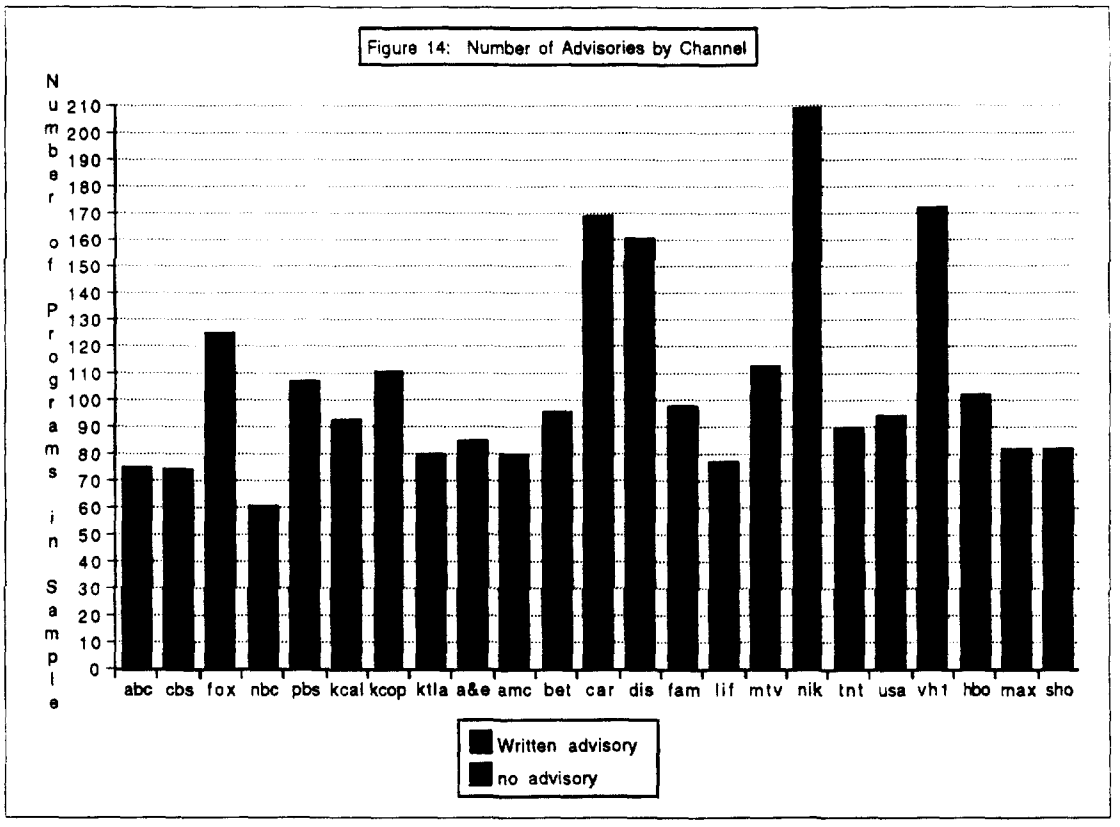
A review of Figure 14 also reveals that 8 of the 23 channels did not use advisories in their sampled programs at all. Moreover, 50 or 48% of the advisories in the sample came from one channel, Showtime.

Text of Advisories

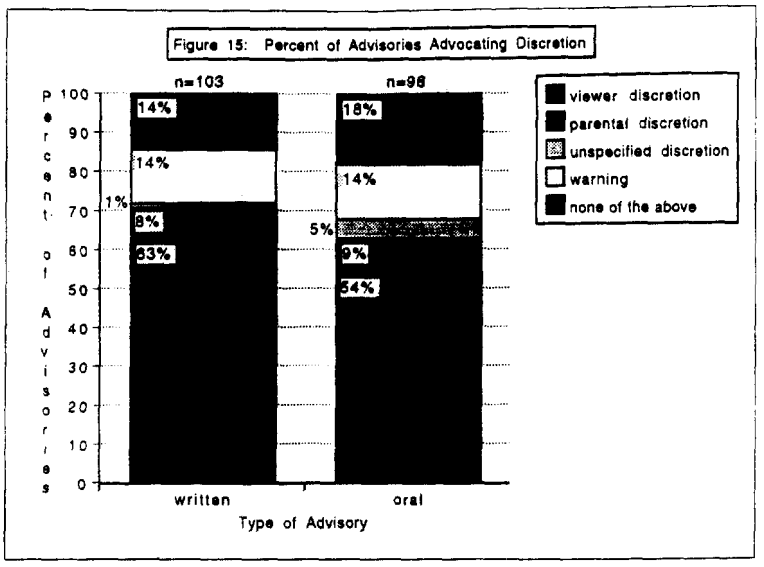
Figure 15 displays the frequency with which various types of discretion were advocated in the advisories. Although the figure reports data from both oral and written advisories, percentages mentioned in this description will refer to written advisories for the sake of simplicity. In terms of the content of these advisories, "viewer discretion"

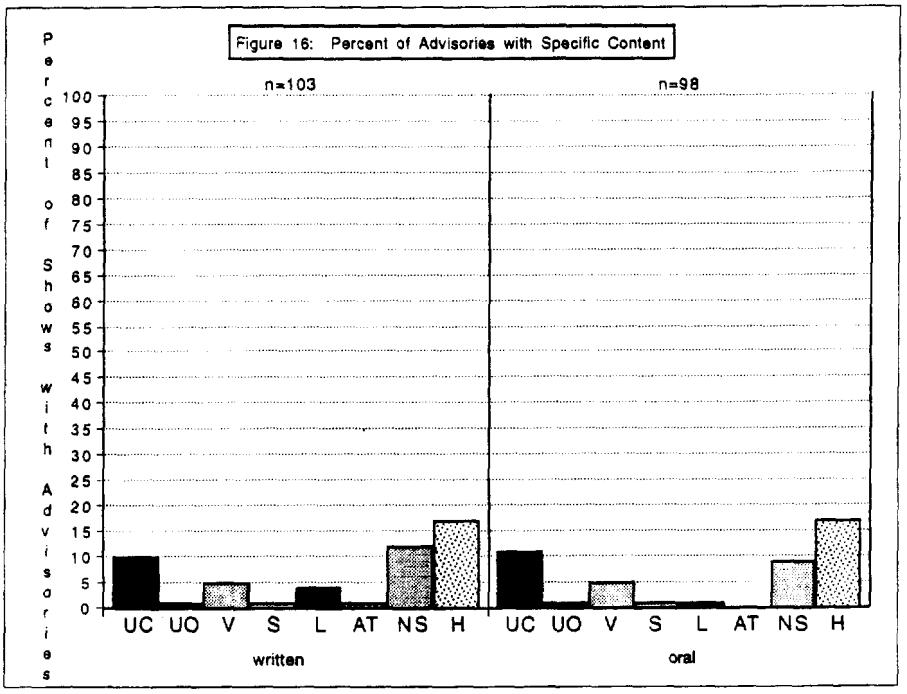
was advocated most frequently, with 63% of the written advisories advocating viewer discretion. It should be acknowledged here, however, that 50, or 77% of these advisories were on one channel, Showtime. "Parental discretion" was advocated for 8% of the programs with written advisories. Two advisories advocated discretion without a specified target. Fourteen percent of the advisories involved a warning without further mentioning discretion.

Figure 16 displays the distribution of other content features of the verbal advisories in the sample. As can be seen from the figure, 10% mentioned the unsuitability of the content for children, and only one advisory mentioned viewer groups not involving children. The mention of the specific content that was responsible for the advisory was relatively rare, with only 5% mentioning violence, 4% mentioning language, and even fewer mentioning sex and adult themes.



NOTE: Advisories involve phrases such as "viewer discretion advised."





KEY: UC - unsuitability for children
UO - unsuitability for others
V - mention of violence
S - mention of sex
L - mention of language
AT - mention of adult themes
NS - nonspecific subject matter
H - humor

Finally, 17% of the advisories involved humor. Three of these were on MTV and involved the Beavis and Butthead disclaimer quoted above, and 14 were on "Stand-Up Spotlight" on VH1, and involved the following language: "Warning. The following material may not be suitable for small children, some adults, a few senior citizens, many farm animals, and most household appliances."

In summary, a small proportion (4%) of the programs in the Year 1 sample involved advisories, and almost half of these came from one premium channel. About three-fourths of all advisories advocated someone's "discretion." Approximately 10% of advisories advocated parental discretion and the same proportion suggested that the content might not be suitable for young viewers. Combining these two types of advisories, approximately 13% indicated that children were a concern, that is, they either advocated parental discretion or indicated a concern for young viewers, or both. For the most part, the advisories were not specific about the nature of the content that prompted the advisory. Five percent of the verbal advisories mentioned violence, and this was the content type mentioned most.

Coding of Ratings

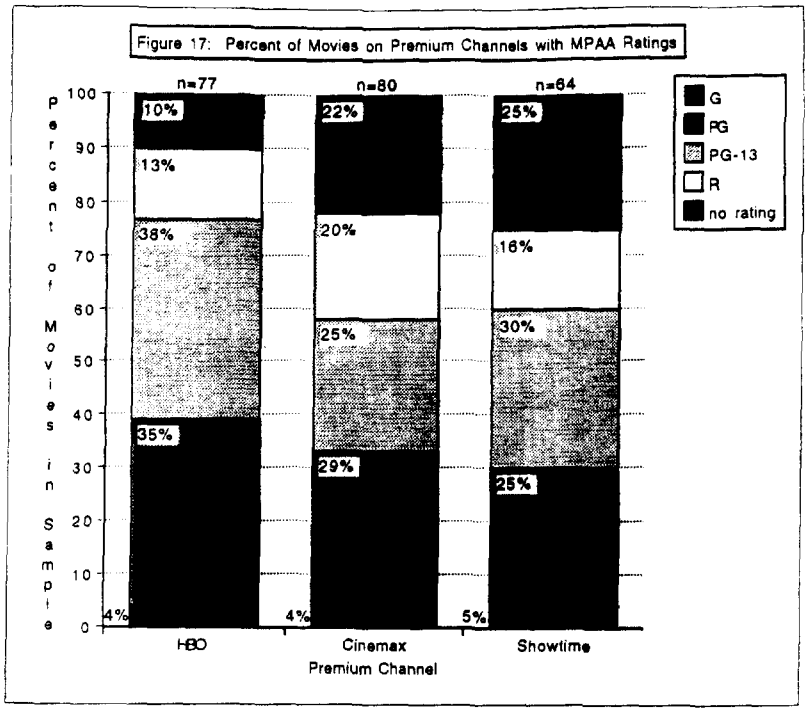
All complete programs in the sample were screened by the content coders in Santa Barbara and Austin for the presence of MPAA ratings and specific content codes. Ratings and content codes were coded according to their mode of presentation, that is, written only, oral only, or both oral and written. They were also coded according to which rating or code was used.

MPAA Ratings

Because these ratings are associated with movies only, the analyses to be reported here are based on the 442 programs in our sample that were designated by the content coders as movies. Of the 442 programs in the sample that were designated as movies, 180, or 41% were shown with MPAA ratings. All but one of these ratings were shown on the three premium movie channels in the sample. Figure 17 shows the distribution of movies with these ratings on these channels. As can be seen from the figure, all three channels gave ratings for most of their movies. HBO presented MPAA ratings on 90% of their movies in the sample; Cinemax gave ratings for 78%, and Showtime gave ratings for 75%. Almost all of these ratings were presented both orally and visually. In addition, one movie, on KTLA, was broadcast with an "R" rating, in written form only.

It should be acknowledged here that there may be a good reason for the failure of nonpremium channels to use MPAA ratings when they show theatrical movies. If these channels typically edit the movies for television, the process of altering the movies' contents makes the initial MPAA designations no longer applicable.

Combining the three premium channels, 30% percent of the movies were rated "PG," and 31% were rated "PG-13." Only 4% were rated "G," and 16% were rated "R." In 19% of the cases, no rating information was provided. There were no "X"-rated or "NC-17"-rated movies in the sample.



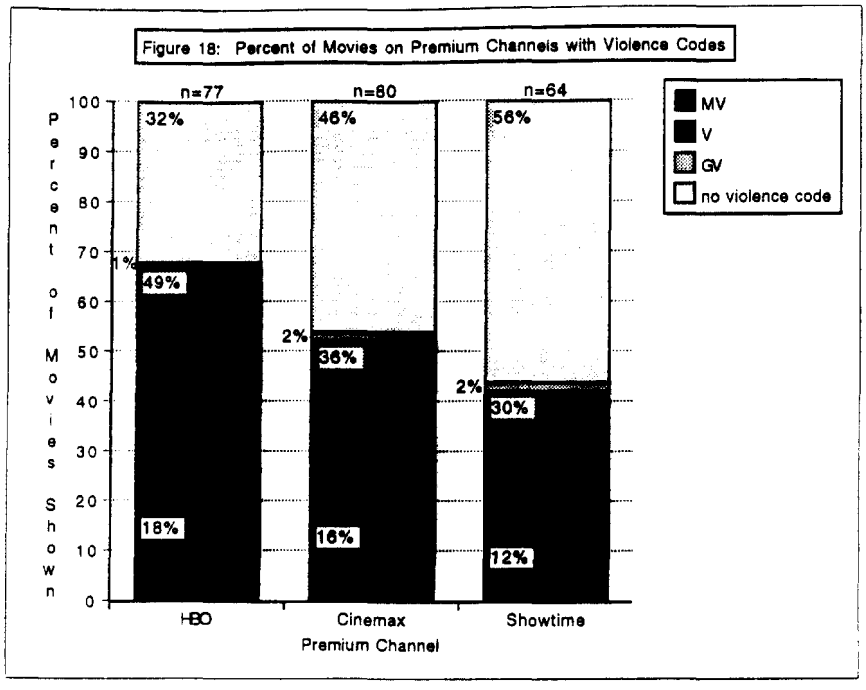
Content Codes

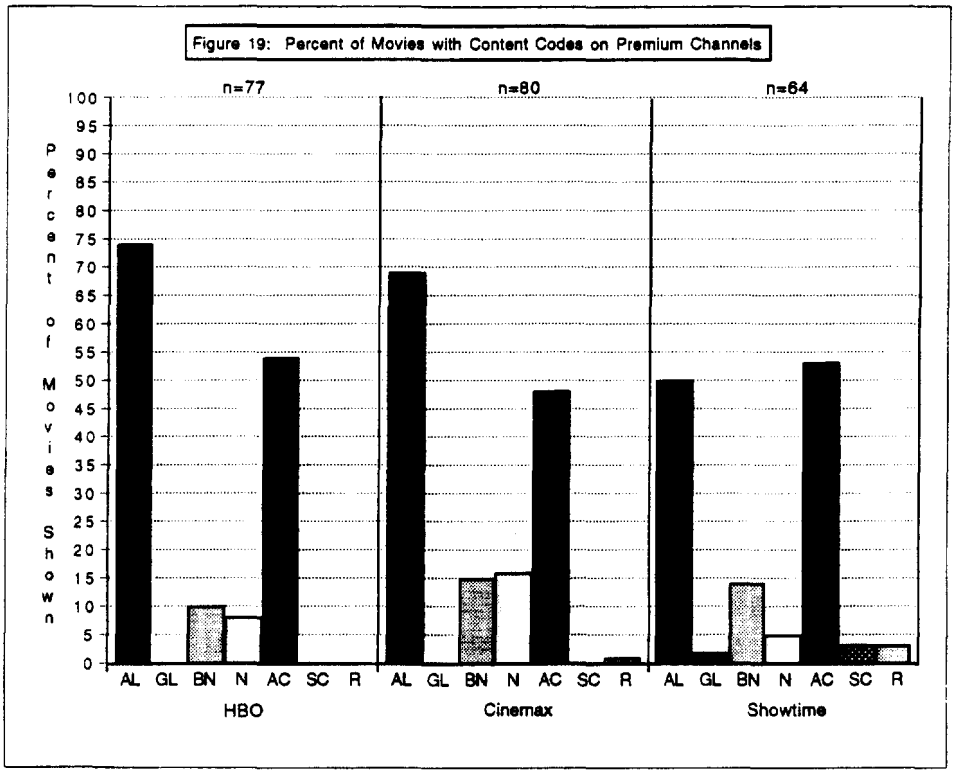
Content codes are independent of any MPAA designation, and are assigned to a movie by the channel carrying it. The content code data was contributed by the coders at Santa Barbara, and analyzed at the Madison site. The codes involved notations for violence, language, nudity, adult content, and rape.

Figure 18 shows the percentage of movies broadcast on the three premium channels that used content codes for violence. This figure shows that the violence codes were used quite heavily by these channels. Combining the three premium channels, more than half of all movies shown on these channels bore one of these codes. The "V: Violence" code was used most by all three channels. A total of 39% of the movies on these channels were so designated. Sixteen percent of the movies used the "MV: Mild Violence" code, and 2% used the "GV: Graphic Violence" code.

Figure 19 shows the percentage of movies broadcast on the premium channels that used the other content codes. Again, it can be seen that these labels were frequently applied to movies. The language codes were the most heavily used, with 65% of the movies aired on these channels featuring the code "AL: Adult Language." The "AC: Adult Content" code was also heavily used, with 52% of movies being so designated. Nudity notations were applied to almost one-fourth of the movies on these channels, with 13% of movies carrying the "BN: Brief Nudity" code and another 10% carrying the "N: Nudity" code. The codes for Graphic Language (GL), Strong Sexual Content (SC), and Rape (R) were used very rarely.

Showtime presented all the content codes both visually and orally. In contrast, most of the content codes that were presented on HBO and Cinemax were presented visually only.





KEY: AL - adult language
GL - graphic language
BN - brief nudity
N - nudity
AC - adult content
SC - strong sexual content
R - rape

Scheduling of Advisories, Ratings, and Codes

To determine how programs with advisories were distributed throughout the day, days were divided into dayparts consistent with the analyses being conducted at the other sites. Programs were placed into dayparts as a function of the time a program began. The dayparts are as follows:

1: 7-9, early morning
2: 9-3, daytime
3: 3-6, late afternoon
4: 6-8, early evening
5: 8-11, prime time.

Because the 9-3 daypart is during school hours during weekdays but not during weekends, analyses were initially done separately for weekdays and weekends. However, the two analyses yielded results that were extremely similar. Therefore, only the results for the entire week are reported here.

An analysis of the timing of advisories revealed that the use of advisories tended to increase over the course of the day. Figure 20 shows the percent of programs in each daypart that were shown with advisories. These percentages range from 1.3% in the early morning to 10.5% in prime time. However, given the small number of advisories overall and the fact that almost half came from one channel (Showtime) and 14% came from one comedy show ("Stand-up Spotlight"), these trends over time probably do not reflect any general trends in the industry as a whole.

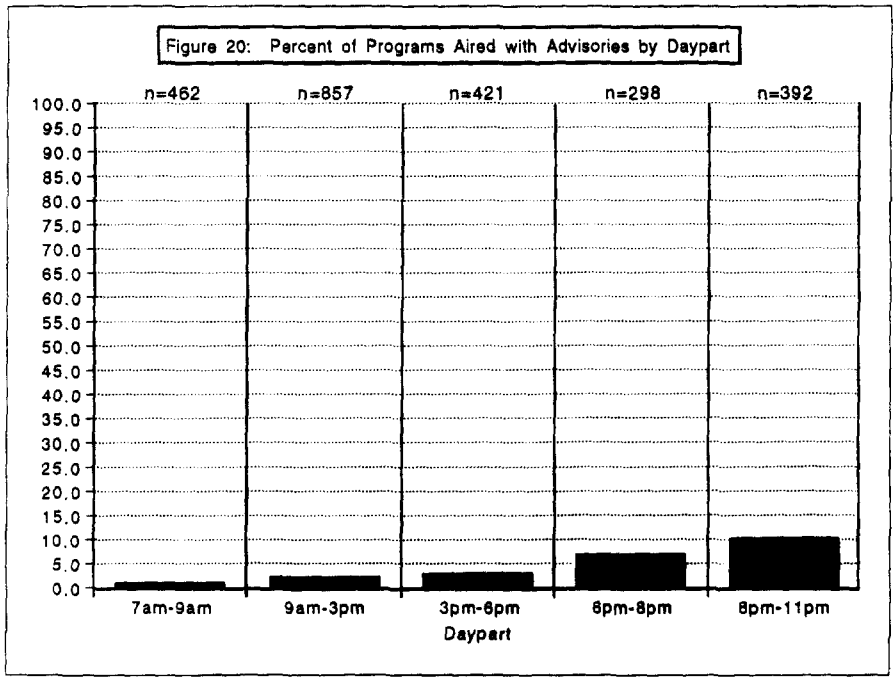


Figure 21 shows the distribution of each of the four observed MPAA Ratings over the dayparts. As the figure shows, the highest proportion of "G"-rated films were presented in the early morning, and the overwhelming majority of "R-Rated" movies were shown in prime time.

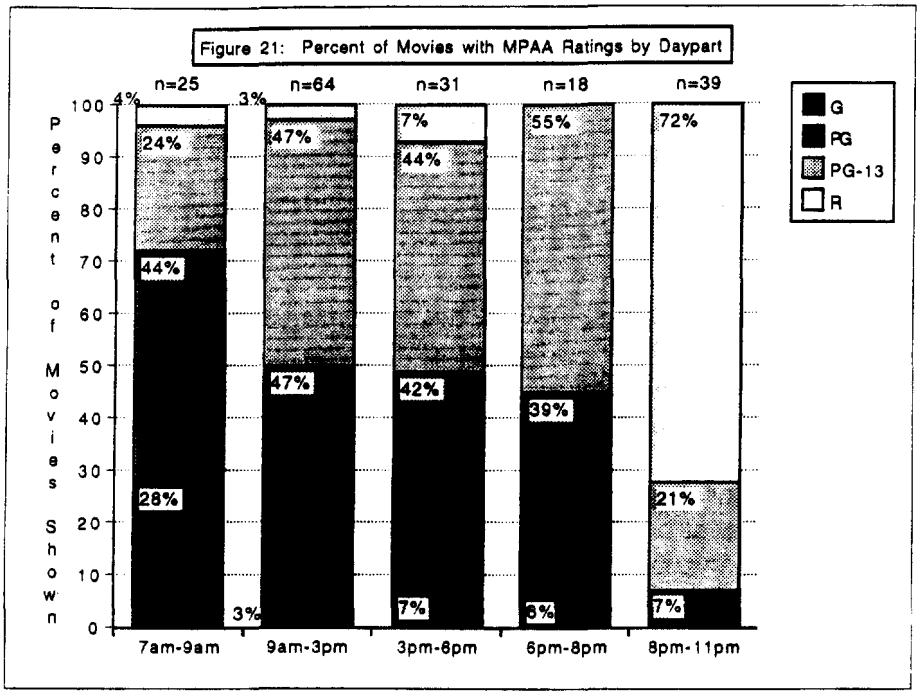
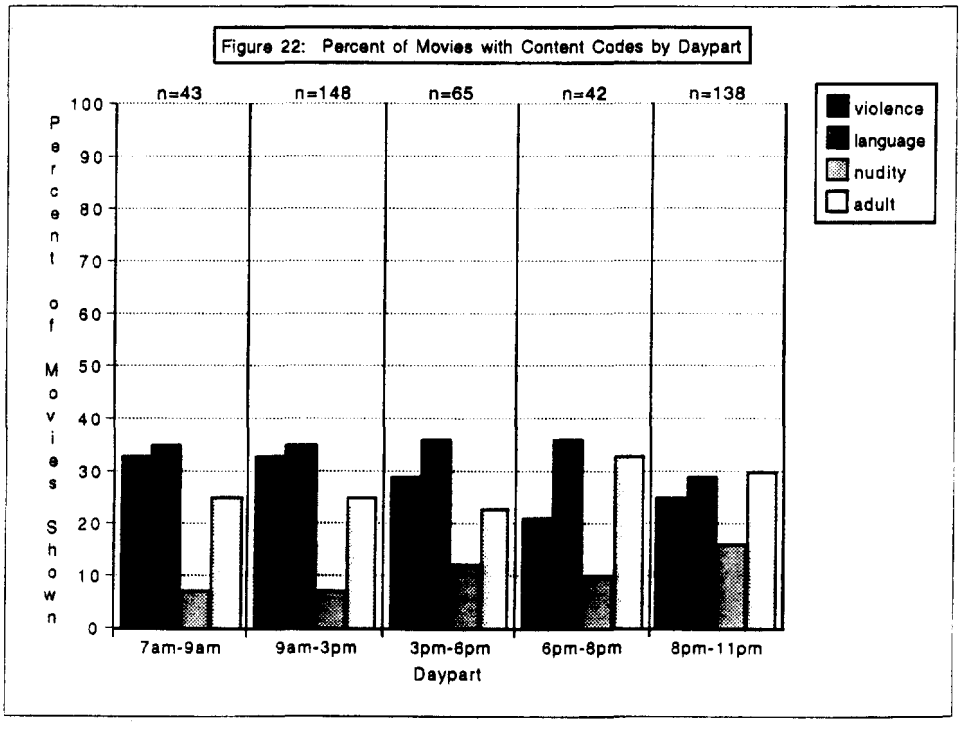


Figure 22 shows the distribution of the various content codes over the same dayparts. This figure shows no marked variations across the time periods.



In summary, then, advisories advocating discretion are rarely used, and when they are used, they are seldom specific about the nature of the content that prompted the advisory. MPAA ratings and specific content codes for movies are used much more frequently, but these appear almost exclusively on the three premium channels in the sample. Whether or not the advisories, restrictive ratings, and content codes are used to signal the most problematic content on television must await further analyses on the content of the sample.

GENERAL DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Effects of Advisories and Ratings on the Attractiveness of Programs

The results of the main experimental research project indicate unequivocally that ratings and advisories can have a significant impact on children's choices of programs and movies on television. Precisely what that impact is depends on a number of things, including aspects of the advisory or rating and characteristics of the child making the choices.

The well known admonition, "parental discretion advised" had a strong and positive effect on boys' interest in viewing reality-action programs, and the effect was strongest for boys in the older group. This same advisory had no impact on girls' tendency to choose such programs. In contrast, another frequently used advisory, "viewer discretion advised," did not increase boys' interest in viewing police-detective shows, but it decreased girls' (and especially younger girls') choices of such programs.

The MPAA ratings "G," "PG," "PG-13," and "R" also strongly affected children's desire to see a movie. Older boys were especially interested in the target movie when it was rated "PG-13" or "R" and completely avoided it when it was rated "G." In contrast, younger girls were most interested in the movie when it was rated "G." For older girls and younger boys, interest in the movie peaked when it was rated "PG-13."

All of the selective exposure data suggest, then, that ratings and advisories are important contributors to children's desire to view or avoid viewing television programming. Although this study does not provide direct answers to the question of why this occurs, some of the findings appear suggestive of various explanations. One question concerns the issue of why "parental" and "viewer" advisories produced such different effects. One possible explanation comes from the data on expectations of the content of programs with advisories. The percentage of children expecting certain forms of violent content was higher for the viewer discretion advisories than for the parental discretion advisories (see Figures 11a and 11b). Perhaps what was considered mild and more manageable violence was attractive to boys, but higher levels were expected to be too intense.

A related question concerns the reason for children's differential interest in the target movie as a function of its MPAA rating. The data on expectations of violent content in movies with different ratings were very consistent, and indicated that expectations of a variety of forms of violent content were lowest for the "G" rating and peaked at the "PG-13" rating (see Figures 12a through 12f). It is interesting to note

that this pattern of expectations of violent content exactly mirrors the pattern of interest in the movie among boys as a group, and among older children as a group (see Figures 4a and 4b).

A second possible explanation for the effects of the two forms of the advisory on children's selective exposure deals with the literal meanings of the two messages. "Parental discretion advised" is a message to parents to shield their children, whereas "viewer discretion advised" exhorts the viewer to take care of him- or herself. Perhaps the boys in this experiment, and particularly the older boys, resented being "treated like children," and took the advisory as a challenge to overcome rather than good advice. Perhaps the viewer advisory was not perceived as so demeaning, and perhaps the boys, being told to decide for themselves, were more willing to accept the message at face value. The data on children's perceptions of the meanings of these two advisories show that although the majority of children in both age groups thought the message implied a parental decision, 22% of children in the older group interpreted the viewer advisory as directed at the viewer ("people"), while only 5% interpreted the parental advisory this way (see Figures 7a and 7b).

Responses to the MPAA ratings are relevant here as well. One explanation for the boys' and older children's interest in the movie when it had the more restrictive ratings of "PG-13" and "R" may be that these ratings signify that the content is explicitly not for children. Children's perceptions of the meaning of the MPAA ratings revealed that all of the older children selected "anyone can watch" as the meaning of a "G" rating. As the level of the rating increased, so too did older children's perception that the message indicated that younger children's viewing was to be avoided. With the exception of the "G" rating, younger children seem not to have had a clear view of the meaning or intention of the MPAA ratings (see Figures 8a through 8d).

It seems likely that both of these explanations, the expectation of more violence and the desire not to be treated as a child, are in part responsible for the pattern of viewing decisions among boys and especially older boys. An additional possible explanation comes from the study of parent-child discussions of viewing choices. The fact that children made positive comments about advisories and the more restrictive of the two ratings involved, characterizing them as "cool" and "awesome," may reflect that such messages endow programs with a nonspecific aura of attractiveness.

These explanations are speculative at this juncture. Future research needs to be done to determine more definitively the mechanisms underlying these effects.

The Role of Background Variables

This research also revealed some interesting relationships between parental involvement, characteristics of children, and the children's responses to ratings and advisories, even after the contributions of gender and age were accounted for. Children whose parents set limits and were more involved in their television viewing were less likely than other children to choose programs with parental advisories and movies with more restrictive ratings. This finding suggests that parental involvement

may become internalized and have beneficial effects even when the child selects programming without adult supervision.

It is also interesting and encouraging that children in some instances behaved sensibly and in their own best interest. Specifically, children who reported experiencing fright reactions from television were more likely to avoid programs with both parental and viewer advisories. These children have apparently learned from their previous experiences and used these messages as they were intended -- to shield themselves from future emotional upsets.

A more disturbing result related to the personality variables was the relationship between program choices and two items tapping aggressive tendencies. The more benign item, "I like rough and tumble games," was positively associated with choosing a program with a parental advisory. The more directly aggression-related item, "I get into fights with other kids," was positively related to choosing a program with a viewer advisory, although this relationship only approached significance. If this relationship holds up under replication, it suggests that advisories may be attracting just those viewers who are of prime concern in our desire to reduce the contribution of violence on television to violence in our society. Research has repeatedly shown that children who are already aggressive are the most likely to become even more violent as a function of exposure to television violence.

Limitations to Generalizability

We must, of course, acknowledge the limitations to the generalizability of the findings of the experiments. The study demonstrated that ratings and advisories can have an impact on children's viewing choices, but the specific effects we observed would not necessarily occur in all groups of children. The children we tested came from a moderately-sized midwestern community, and the children who participated, although representing a range of socioeconomic neighborhoods, were predominantly Caucasian. Research to be conducted next year will involve samples of children from a larger city and of a more diverse ethnic mix, and will include both inner-city and suburban children.

The different findings for "parental" vs. "viewer" discretion must be explored further and these messages must be tested in the context of different types of programs. In this experiment, the parental advisories were tested with reality-action shows, while the viewer advisories were tested with police-detective dramas. Although there is no theoretical reason to expect that it is the show type rather than the advisory type that is responsible for the differential effects, this alternative should be tested in future years. It would also be worthwhile to test these advisories and other types of advisories, ratings, and codes in the context of other types of program descriptions.

Implications for Industry Decisions and Public Policy

Even though there are important questions that remain to be answered, the findings regarding the effect of advisories and ratings on children's choices of programs should lead us, at the very least, to use caution in assigning ratings and advisories to television offerings where children are concerned. Since in our

experiment, the presence of "parental discretion advised" and the "PG-13" and "R" ratings increased boys' interest in programs and movies, the possibility that such messages might attract viewers should be kept in mind when considering the various options for informing the public about problematic content on television.

On the other hand, since "viewer discretion advised" was used in a sensible fashion by girls and children who frequently experienced fright reactions to television, the potential value of such messages when used by children should not be overlooked. It may be somewhat reassuring to note that in our sample, the advisory that produced the "boomerang" effect ("parental discretion advised") was used rarely, and less frequently than other messages advocating discretion.

In terms of public policy, we should consider alternatives involving better communication with both parents and children about television content, and future research should explore the most effective strategies. In addition, we should be willing to consider the feasiblity of technological alternatives that would allow the parent to unilaterally restrict access without calling the child's attention to the restricted content.

Finally, the content analysis of the use of ratings and advisories constitutes an initial step toward an awareness of how such messages are currently being used by the providers of television fare. This report provides us with an analysis of the frequencies with which advisories, ratings, and codes are being used and by whom. Future reports will provide information on how appropriately these messages are placed in terms of signalling the content that presents the highest risk to viewers and will let us compare the industry's use of these messages over the course of three years.

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RATINGS AND ADVISORIES:

Implications for the New Rating System for Television

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Note. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Duke Conference on Media Violence and Public Policy, June 28-29, 1996. It was also presented to the TV Ratings Implementation Group, Washington D.C., on September 17, 1996.

Introduction

This chapter discusses the research on ratings and advisories from the National Television Violence Study that are most relevant to the development and evaluation of the new rating system for television. The new rating system has provoked a great deal of criticism because, like its similar predecessor the Motion Picture Association (MPAA) ratings, it does not indicate the specific content of a program, but merely provides parental guidance regarding the age of the viewer who should see it. Although the research reported here was completed before the television industry had designed its new system, the results are highly relevant because they demonstrate the effects of the similar MPAA ratings on children's viewing choices and show the types of content that the MPAA ratings have been associated with on television.

The research presented here shows that parental discretion warnings and the more restrictive MPAA ratings stimulate some children's interest in viewing programs. Specifically, in an experiment in which children between the ages of 5 and 14 were given choices of programs to view, the label "parental discretion advised" had a strong and positive effect on boys' interest in the programs, and the effect was strongest for older boys (age 10-14). The MPAA ratings "G," "PG," "PG-13," and "R" also strongly affected children's desire to see a movie. Older boys were especially interested in the target movie when it was rated "PG-13" or "R" and completely avoided it when it was rated "G." For older girls and younger boys, interest in the movie peaked when it was

rated "PG-13." In contrast, another type of label worked more or less as intended: "Viewer discretion advised" did not increase boys' interest, and it decreased girls' (and particularly younger girls') desire to view programs.

Further analyses suggest that the increased interest in restricted programs is more strongly linked to children's desire to reject control over their viewing (the "forbidden fruit hypothesis") than to their seeking out of violent content (the "information hypothesis"). In line with this interpretation, the label "contains some violent content; parental discretion advised" was no more attractive than "parental discretion advised" by itself. Moreover, "viewer discretion advised" produced higher expectations of violent content than "parental discretion advised," yet only the parental advisory proved attractive.

In analyses not included in the original NTVS report, we also looked at the Year 1 random sample of television programming in terms of the correspondence between MPAA ratings and the premium channel content codes used on HBO, Showtime, and Cinemax. These content codes indicate the type and level of sex, violence, and coarse language a program contains. Problems with the MPAA ratings were noted in the fact that there was considerable overlap in the content of movies rated "PG" and "PG-13," and because each of these ratings signals a variety of different combinations of content that might be objectionable to different groups of parents.

Based on these findings, we conclude that the new rating system is especially problematic because it provides little information about specific content at the same time

that it is likely to stimulate some children's interest in more restricted fare. A system based on information about specific content rather than who should or should not see a program would better serve the interests of parents and others who are concerned about the welfare of children.

Background

As part of the National Television Violence Study, funded by the National Cable Television Association, researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison explored the use and effects of ratings and advisories (Cantor & Harrison, 1997). With the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the questions posed here have come to the center of public attention. The Act mandated that within two years of passage, new televisions be manufactured with a "V-chip," which will permit the blocking of objectionable content, and that television programs be rated or labeled to provide information that will be readable by the V-chip. Shortly after passage of the Act, entertainment industry executives agreed to develop a rating system that would be in effect by January 1997. The new system was released to the public on December 19, 1996, and presented to the Federal Communications Commission on January 17, 1997.

The new system, referred to as "The TV Parental Guidelines," is different in some ways from the MPAA ratings. A separate, two-level rating system is used for programs that are considered to be designed for children ("TV-Y, All Children," and "TV-Y7, Directed to Older Children"). Other programs are designated with one of four ratings: